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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 001931

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TAGS: PHUM ECON KPAO PGOV SOCI UZ

SUBJECT: JIZZAKH AND SYRDARYA EXCHANGE PROGRAM ALUMNI FULL
OF NEW IDEAS FOR PROJECTS

REF: TASHKENT 1744

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

¶11. (C) Summary: During a two-day tour of Jizzakh and Syrdarya provinces on October 31 and November 1, poloff met with several USG international exchange program alumni who described what they learned in the United States and how they have transferred that knowledge to their home communities. The alumni remain full of ideas for new projects, despite financial limitations. In contrast to other recent trips by poloffs to Uzbekistan's provinces (reftel), none of the contacts poloff met have so far experienced negative repercussions. End summary.

DISCUSSION WITH COCHRAN PROGRAM ALUMNUS IN JIZZAKH

¶12. (C) On October 31, poloff met with Omar Namozov, an alumnus of USDA Foreign Agricultural Service's Cochran Fellowship program from Jizzakh's Zimon district. Before participating in the exchange, which focused on fruit and vegetable processing, Namozov worked as director of a dried fruit production plant. The plant recently relocated to Tashkent after its owner was elected to Uzbekistan's Senate. Namozov continues to operate his own private farm, where he raises cattle and grows melons, onions and other produce.

¶13. (C) Along with two other Cochran fellows from Uzbekistan, Namozov visited Minnesota and North Dakota for three weeks in July and August. Namozov was uniformly positive about his experience and reported being impressed by the system of food storage and distribution in the United States, recalling in particular a high-tech storage facility he visited in Fargo. He noted that food storage and distribution was a major problem for Uzbek farmers, who often rely on self-constructed storage units on their farms that preserve produce for much shorter periods of time. Inspired by what he saw in the United States, Namozov plans to pool together resources with his neighbors and request a bank loan to open a modern storage facility for farmers in his region.

¶14. (C) Namozov told poloff that he was impressed by American farmers' knowledge of marketing. He noted that Uzbek farmers lack basic marketing skills and fail to anticipate market demand when planting. As a result, they are forced to sell their crops at whatever price the market demands at harvest time. This problem is further compounded by the lack of

modern storage equipment, which forces farmers to quickly offload their crops, even at a loss, before they spoil. In order to increase exports of food stuffs to neighboring countries, Namozov also believes that food processing must be further developed in Uzbekistan.

¶15. (C) Namozov was also impressed by level of mechanization in American agriculture, observing that farmers can tend 50 hectares of land with only two or three workers. On his 20 hectare plot of land, Namozov said that he employs between 10 and 40 workers, depending on the season. Namozov also said he learned a great deal about the careful application of herbicides at American farms, noting that the use of herbicides in Uzbekistan is haphazard and often ends up killing as many crops as weeds.

MEETINGS WITH COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS ALUMNI IN JIZZAKH AND SYRDARYA

¶16. (C) On October 31, poloff organized a dinner in Jizzakh city with three alumni of the Community Connections (CC) program and one alumnus of the Partners in Education (PIE) program, and on November 1, poloff hosted a lunch in Syrdarya province for four CC program alumni. The alumni are all teachers or administrators at local secondary schools, colleges and institutes, and each traveled to different regions of the United States for three weeks to learn about the American system of education.

¶17. (C) All of the alumni fondly remembered their experiences in the United States, and most of them reported becoming more active in their communities upon their return. One alumnus

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in Jizzakh said that she was so impressed by volunteerism in America that she formed her own environmental NGO, which has since organized summer camps, cleanup hikes and ecology lessons for local students. Other alumni in Jizzakh and Syrdarya reported organizing seminars and conferences where they shared modern teaching methodologies they learned in the United States with other instructors. Many of the alumni remained in contact with their American host families and colleagues, and one alumnus in Syrdarya reported that a member of her host family even visited her in Uzbekistan last year.

¶18. (C) Almost all of the alumni in Jizzakh and Syrdarya reported working closely with Peace Corps volunteers and mourned their departure from Uzbekistan (Note: The Peace Corps program in Uzbekistan was forced to close in 2005. End note.) Nevertheless, several of the alumni continued projects originally begun by volunteers. For example, in both Jizzakh and Syrdarya, the alumni implemented American-themed English language summer camps that used to be run by volunteers. The alumni also continued to manage several English-language resource centers at their schools originally opened by volunteers. One of the resource centers in Jizzakh is still officially called the "American Center."

¶19. (C) The alumni were full of ideas for new projects, though they reported that financial constraints have become greater since the departure of the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) in 2006, which used to support alumni projects. Several of the alumni requested Embassy assistance in acquiring internet connections for computer resource centers at their schools (none of the alumni reported having internet access at their schools) and financial assistance for English-language summer camps. All of the alumni were also interested in acquiring more English-language material, especially textbooks and novels, which they said was difficult and expensive to acquire in Uzbekistan. Poloff encouraged the alumni to apply for alumni and Democracy Commission grants offered by the Embassy and offered assistance in acquiring books in English.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) The international exchange program alumni poloff encountered in Jizzakh and Syrdarya province were uniformly positive about their experiences in the United States and continue to be full of ideas for new community projects, despite the financial constraints they faced. From a public relations standpoint, we continue to believe that international exchange programs are one of the best investments of our funds. Though the government has forced the departure from Uzbekistan of the Embassy's implementing partners, it is critical that we continue to keep these programs alive, as well as find ways to support alumni endeavors.

¶11. (C) Before heading out on his trip, poloff informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that he would be meeting with the alumni, which may explain why they have (so far) avoided any negative repercussions. In contrast, during previous trips to Uzbekistan's provinces this fall, poloffs did not inform the MFA beforehand that they would be meeting with nongovernmental contacts, and some of those contacts were subsequently harassed (reftel). On the other hand, poloffs continue to operate under restrictions. For example, the GOU officially notified us that we may not meet outside Tashkent with human rights activists until after the December 23 elections (consequently, we will invite contacts to Tashkent for Human Rights Day on December 10 and other events).

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